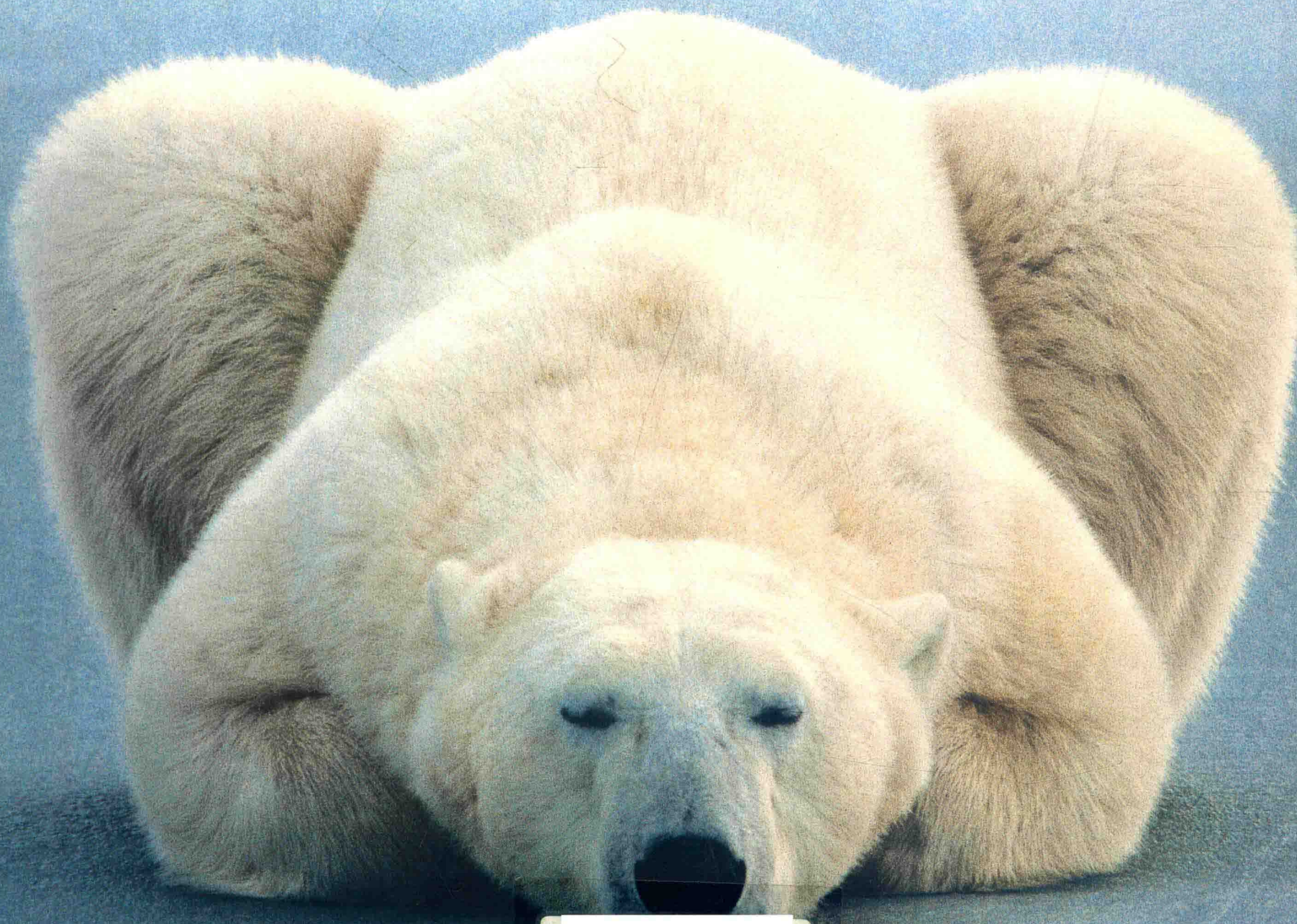


THE WORLD OF THE  
POLAR BEAR



NORBERT ROSING



# The World of the Polar Bear

N O R B E R T   R O S I N G



FIREFLY BOOKS





## A FIREFLY BOOK

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Readers interested in purchasing any of the images in this book should contact National Geographic Image Collection at [www.ngsimages.com](http://www.ngsimages.com), or the photographer at [www.rosing.de](http://www.rosing.de).





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Above: Mothers with single cubs are always being pestered by their playful three-month-olds. On this windy, bitterly cold day this mother's head was a convenient resting place for her cub. Bears always lie with their backs to the wind, so I was forced to face into it. With a temperature of  $-18^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-28^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), by the end of the day the batteries on four cameras had failed and my fingertips and face were frostbitten, but the results were well worth it.

Right: Mother and cub enjoy their first days in the sun, gently playing, mouthing and wrestling with each other.







## FOREWORD

So long as the human ear can hark back to the breaking of waves over deep seas; so long as the human eye can follow the gleam of the Northern Lights over the silent snow fields; then so long, no doubt, will the lure of the unknown draw restless souls into those great Arctic wastes.

— Polar explorer Roald Amundsen, *Our Polar Flight* (1925)

Living in the Arctic is an experience most of us will never have. Summers are filled with endless days when the tundra is alive with multicolored flowers and wild berries. The swarms of mosquitoes are so fierce that even the caribou move to the coast in search of a gentle breeze. In winter the endless darkness is interrupted only by the occasional fireworks show known as the aurora borealis.

We are lucky to have Norbert Rosing as our guide in this journey of discovery to the northernmost part of the world. Through his sensitive photography we discover that those legendary vast spaces of the Arctic are full of wonder, drama and tenderness. Norbert is not content with just documenting the existence of exotic wildlife in unusual locations. His gift as a photographer is his great curiosity about the natural world. His magic is displayed in photographs that weave light, color and action into a tapestry that tells volumes about life in the Far North.

In this wonderful book we accompany Norbert to some of the world's remotest regions, where we meet the polar bear up close and personal. Not only do we witness snarling encounters between males, but we also observe a mother as she patiently endures the constant ear pulling of her playful cubs. Norbert's love for the North is rivaled only by his love of the polar bear and of photography. No photographer has been able to understand the complexities of the life cycle of the polar bear and to bring them to life in such an evocative way as Norbert

Rosing. His intuitiveness and perseverance have led him to explore a polar bear den, as well as to follow the animal across frozen seas with its companion, the elusive and enchanting arctic fox.

As we turn the pages of *The World of the Polar Bear*, we realize that the vastness of the tundra we are so used to hearing about is full of excitement and danger. The polar bear is not alone in its fight for survival in this harsh environment. Muskoxen stand in a circle protecting their young from possible predators. As spring approaches, a walrus calf on an ice floe suckles contentedly as its mother keeps a watchful eye on a nearby polar bear and her cubs. We can almost hear the roar of a herd of walrus plunging into the water in unison when a curious and hungry bear approaches.

On long winter nights the northern lights add even more drama to the spectacle of wildlife and scenery in the Arctic. This book once again capitalizes on Norbert's poetic talents by showing the intricate shapes and patterns of the aurora borealis and other weather-related phenomena.

The adventure part of this book is a must-read for anyone interested in surviving adverse conditions in less than favorable weather. As Norbert's editor at *National Geographic Magazine*, I have found myself editing photographs of his quests and admonishing him, "Norbert, don't ever do this again." There is usually silence at the other end of the transatlantic call, then he responds with a chuckle, "It wasn't as bad as it looks." Indeed, Norbert has risked his life in order to bring us the extraordinary pictures contained in this book.

Someone once said that life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away. In *The World of the Polar Bear* Norbert Rosing shows us how to live life to its fullest.

John A. Echave, Senior Editor, *National Geographic Magazine*





This mother was resting on the tundra, her cub playing on her back, when she suddenly decided to stand up. The baby didn't want to let go and seemed to be enjoying the view. I have often seen mother bears carry their offspring on their backs, but only for short distances.



## PREFACE

My arctic adventure began in a Winnipeg library late one February afternoon in 1983. Just a few hours earlier, I had stepped off a bus from Montreal. I had intended to spend the night in Manitoba's capital before continuing west to the Yukon. My plans, however, were about to change dramatically.

Stooped over the library's maps of the Canadian North, I was anticipating the trip ahead when I was interrupted by a young Inuk. "Planning a trip north?" he asked. When I nodded, he continued, "The arctic experience in winter is mostly about learning to love the cold. Luckily, you don't have to go all the way to Resolute Bay to find it. Just take the train north to Churchill." He pointed to a dot on the shore of Hudson Bay. "If it isn't cold enough for you there, I'd recommend a trip to the South Pole."

Intrigued, I took his advice and boarded the train for Churchill the next morning. After a 36-hour trip through wheat fields followed by what seemed like endless boreal forest, we reached our destination. A sudden storm had transformed the town into an icy desert. Like a tortoise in its shell, I retreated deep into my parka, hoisted my heavy knapsack over my shoulder and fought my way towards the town's only open hotel.

The next two days were spoiled by my inexperience with the Arctic. I saw a dazzling display of northern lights, but my film froze in the bitterly cold temperatures and my camera stopped working altogether. I phoned my folks in Germany, but even their familiar voices couldn't alleviate my sense of disappointment and frustration. Fleeing on a plane, I had no idea that Churchill and the Far North would one day become my home away from home.

Before the early 1980s, not many people were familiar with Churchill, aside from the prairie wheat farmers who shipped their grain to Canada's only arctic seaport, and employees of Canadian National Railways who rode the desolate lines to this northern terminus. Seven hundred miles by air from Winnipeg, the town is at a latitude of 58 degrees 44 minutes north, the same as Stockholm, Sweden, and Oslo, Norway. The view of the town from an airplane perfectly reveals its isolation, right in the middle of the tundra that skirts the true Arctic.

In the past two decades, Churchill has become an internationally renowned center for wildlife research and ecotourism, its name synonymous with polar bears, northern lights, massive bird migrations, whale pods and a harsh landscape that surprises visitors by yielding colorful annual crops of wildflowers. Scientists, photographers and film teams are among the thousands of people who flock to the town each year.

In the five years following my first visit to Churchill, the aurora borealis display stayed in my mind, and I returned in March 1988 to try again to capture it on film. It proved to be one of the best years ever for this spectacular phenomenon, and I couldn't contain my enthusiasm. People in town took note and kindly offered advice on other subjects I might want to photograph: the snow goose migration, the ice breakup, the beluga whales, the wildflowers and, of course, the polar bears.

Since those first visits to the Far North, I have evolved from a novice hobbyist into a professional photographer. "Up there," hours of total frustration mixed with moments of pure happiness are part of any photographer's life. Sitting in tents waiting out storms, dealing with broken equipment and being at the wrong place at the wrong time can make life miserable. But capturing a polar bear mother interacting with her cubs or traveling through a pristine wonderland under cloudless skies more than makes up for the bad times. Working with experienced guides and wildlife experts, not to mention cultivating patience, has been the key to any success I have had as a photographer. To capture a moment in the wild takes 1/250 of a second; to find the right place at the right time in the right light and with the right equipment can take weeks, even years in the case of some shots.

Over the past 17 years, I have returned to the Churchill area at least twice a year. Today my wife, Elli, and I are proud to be welcomed back as semipermanent residents. I have also had the opportunity to travel farther north – to photograph arctic foxes and muskoxen on Victoria Island, walrus at Coral Harbour and Igloolik, beluga whales off Somerset Island and narwhal off Baffin Island. But the polar bear, ever since I first saw one swimming in a northern lake, has become my primary subject. From that first contact I experienced a rush of adrenaline, a heady hybrid of respect and awe that has continued to fuel my passion for *Ursus maritimus* and the northern land it inhabits.





Like any other fever, the polar bear bug has a number of symptoms, not the least of which is simple admiration for the bears. Its lingering effect also includes a deep appreciation for all northern regions, where your mind is free to roam across a vast landscape. It awakens your senses to the richness inherent in this austere land, where the clean, crisp air can be fractured by the haunting calls of cranes, loons and wild geese flying overhead or by the unrelenting whir of a mosquito buzzing about your head.

This is a land that demands respect. Yet, despite its remoteness and size and apparent strength, the Far North is fragile. Climate change, oil

and mineral exploration, overhunting – all create effects that ripple through an intricately balanced and interconnected natural world.

Just a short time ago I again began to concentrate on photographing in the Hudson Bay–James Bay Lowlands. Even after all my years there I still discover “white spots” on the map, places I have never been. One of these was Wapusk, a national park southeast of Churchill. Polar bears den in the park, giving birth to a new generation in what is now a protected area. I hope this book will inspire you to support the work of the tireless people who are striving to safeguard the polar bear and its irreplaceable world.